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Executive Summary

Title: Non-Kinetic Shaping Operations: The Soviet Information Campaign Supporting the Invasion of Afghanistan

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Thesis: The information campaign that the Soviet Union conducted in support of the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, is a historical example of how information operations can shape the battlefield and set the conditions for tactical and operational level victory.

Discussion: On December 27th 1979 the Soviet Union initiated their first, and last, military operation outside the Soviet Bloc when they invaded the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Soviet-Afghan relations started in 1919 and as the Cold War developed, Afghanistan became vital to the national security of the Soviet Union. In 1978 Afghanistan was in turmoil and a revolution against the Marxist-Leninist regime threatened to overthrow the government and end Soviet influence in the area. The Soviet Politburo felt threatened by the United States as well as by the Islamic fundamentalist movement that had already taken root in Iran and Pakistan. They came to the determination that military intervention was necessary for them to maintain their sphere of influence and protect their Central Asian border. Following a combined air-ground invasion and a coordinated deception effort the Soviet 40th Army executed a coup de main in the capital city to replace the ruling government. Coordinated and synchronized attacks confused and disoriented the Afghan army so they were incapable of mounting a defense. Within 48 hours the Soviets achieved their operational objectives with minimal casualties. In the background, an information campaign helped to shape the strategic and operational environment surrounding the invasion. The Soviets used information and propaganda initially to gain domestic support and diminish the international opposition to their actions. They also used information in conjunction with active measures to deceive the government and Army of Afghanistan and achieve operational and tactical surprise that was critical to the success of the invasion. The Soviet Union had effectively used Information Operations (IO) to shape the battlefield and support invasion at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. Studies often overlook the success of the invasion, and the associated lessons because of the larger strategic failure. The ability of the Soviets to use information to affect the military intervention is an example of effective IO and demonstrates how to leverage the core capabilities to generate tactical advantages. This study attempts to illustrate the success and the effectiveness of a well coordinated and comprehensive information campaign.

Conclusion: The Soviet coup de main was an extremely effective operation that achieved significant operational objectives at little cost to the attackers. The tenets that the Soviet Union had developed proved once again to be valid and effective. Their use of IO within a campaign design allowed them to shape battlefield and set the conditions for success at the tactical and operational level. IO is a principle concern for the military as the United States is engaged in the battle for the "hearts and minds" both domestically and internationally. Current IO doctrine focuses more on the technological aspect of IO, but the successful use of an information campaign by the Soviet Union in support of the operational maneuver on the ground is a relevant example of the ability of information to support tactical combat operations.

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Preface

In spite of the inability of the Soviet Union to defeat the mujahideen in Afghanistan, the Soviet Afghan war has many lessons for military professionals as the United States engages counter insurgency operations. Soviet successes and failures in the Soviet Afghan War provide lessons that I believe are relevant to the current operations in which coalition forces are engaged. I chose the Soviet Afghan War because as I studied the British and the Soviet experiences in Afghanistan, I recognized that the Soviets were encountering difficulties similar to those of the British and similar to those existing today. Any study of Afghanistan illustrates that the rate of change there is slower than we are used to in the United States. The tactics, and equipment, used against the Soviets were the same as those used in World War II. Technology has less of an impact there because it is overwhelmed by the terrain, both physical and cultural. The current COIN doctrine fails to identify lessons from any of the three counterinsurgencies conducted in Afghanistan, despite the commonalities. My focus is on the Soviet experience leading up to Phase II COIN operations, and really only sets the stage for what was to follow. There is a lot to learn from the historical analysis of the Soviet Afghan War, and I fear that we may, like the Soviets, fail to recognize this and then relearn what is already documented, at the cost of time, money and lives. The Afghani people have a great memory and the Soviet Army of 1979 suffered because of the legacy of the Bolshevik suppression of the Islamic Basmachi in the 1920s. The people of Afghanistan have not forgotten what happened the last time an international, non-Islamic, superpower invaded their nation, replaced their government, and subsequently brought the fight to the rural villages in December of 1979.

During the Cold War, the ultimate war of ideologies, information was the weapon of choice for the United States and Soviet Union. Predominantly it was used to affect international opinion, but the Soviet Union demonstrated the impact that it can have across the levels of war. When the Soviet Union invaded the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) in late December of 1979, they used information to shape the battlefield simultaneously across the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The relevance of the Soviet-Afghan war to current coalition operations is debatable because of many differences in objective, force composition and operations,[1] however, there can be no debate that there are lessons that can be applied to military operations in general. The affect of the Soviet Union's information campaign in support of the initial invasion of Afghanistan is a lesson that military leaders should take away from this analysis.

Similar to the doctrinal use of surface, aviation and naval surface fires to shape the battle field and set the conditions for success, the Soviet Union coordinated the information campaign to shape both the cognitive and physical battlefields and set the conditions for the successful opening gambit of the Soviet-Afghan War. The information campaign was comprehensive, synchronized and focused on the desired endstate. It concurrently targeted international opinion, Soviet popular opinion, and the command and control infrastructure of the DRA along parallel tracks with five basic messages. This campaign demonstrates how to gain tactical and operational advantages by leveraging the capabilities of IO within the cognitive dimension of the information environment. In short, this is a historical example of how non-kinetic shaping operations can support the kinetic fight when the plans are synchronized and coordinated.

INFORMATION OPERATIONS DEFINED

> *Perhaps the simplest way of defining what IO/IW is all about, is to say that any organized use or manipulation of information/knowledge which produces an advantage in a contest with an opponent, constitutes an aspect of IW/IO. Whether the use or manipulation is applied against the wetware in an opponent's head, or the software and hardware in an opponent's technological base, is a matter of instantiation.*[2]

Joint Publication (JP) 1-02 *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines Information Operation (IO) is "the integrated employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own."[3] While IO gained prominence, Information Warfare (IW) was deleted from the JP 1-02 and the JP 3-13 *Information Operations*, and thus removed from U.S. military lexicon. The primary components of information warfare, deception and propaganda, still remain but have a diminished role under the current IO doctrine. Deception is perceived more as an action intended to mislead an enemy, like a unit formation or feint to draw the enemy's attention. Based on the military and governmental bungling of propaganda efforts associated with Operation Iraqi Freedom propaganda has become associated with the unscrupulous use of information. "Critics have labeled U.S. government attempts to bring news to people in other nations as 'propaganda' intended to sway popular opinion, sometimes using false information."[4] Regardless of what it is called, information is a powerful weapon that can used to manipulate ideas, perceptions and beliefs to win the "hearts and minds" as well as directly support ground operations.

THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN

In 1978 the rural Afghanis were in the midst of a jihad that pitted the tribal *lashkar* (defense forces) against the representatives of the national government. The Marxist-Leninist based People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in a coup d'état in April 1978 and initiated a program of reformation that threatened to change the social and cultural framework of the nation, and this sparked the jihad in much of the rural population. The tribes regarded the PDPA as Soviet puppets and they revolted in violent opposition to the reformation and the influence of the atheistic Communists. The resistance to the governmental interference existed on a practical level, because of the hardships that the reformations were causing, and on an ideological level, due to the religious backdrop of the government actions.[5] The PDPA was factionalized and within the first year following the initial coup, Hafizullah Amin led another inter-party coup and seized party leadership from Nur Taraki. Once in power, Amin advocated greater reform on a shorter timeline which resulted in increased opposition. Refusing to accept dissention and opposition, Amin purged supporters of the previous president from government and military positions. Typically the targets were either imprisoned or killed so that they could not plot to overthrow Amin. As the oppression increased and threatened a more of the population, the urban inhabitants and soldiers fled to the mountains and the revolution gained support and soldiers. The situation spiraled quickly out of control and the PDPA was not capable of providing security or governance for the nation. "Civil war raged throughout the country in 1978 and 1979. Neither of the opposing sides could attain a quick victory over the other without significant help from the outside. Under these circumstances, the ruling circles in Kabul looked to the Soviet Union for help."[6]

SOVIET AFGHAN ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION

Soviet-Afghan engagement and cooperation began in 1919. Then, after the United States rejected their advances, Afghanistan signed an agreement in 1956 in which the Soviet Union began providing financial and material support to Afghanistan and the Soviet Minister of Defense assumed responsibility for training Afghan national military cadres.[7] The PDPA was having difficulty finding loyal Afghanis to serve in government and military positions, so the Soviet government provided personnel to fill the vacancies. By 1978 there were an estimated 1,500 Soviet officials in the Afghan civilian ministries and between 3,500 – 4,000 Soviet officers and technicians working with the armed forces. KGB and military advisors integrated down the battalion level in the DRA Army and some Soviet officers reportedly commanded Afghan units and provided air support to the Afghan Army for internal operations in October 1979.[8] By requesting and accepting the additional support, the Afghan government slowly surrendered the essential activities of power and allowed the Soviet Union to develop the mechanism they would use to control information and sever the command and control of the DRA Army units that could have opposed the invasion.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

Afghanistan had geopolitical importance as a major crossroad through Asia with major north-south and east-west routes; the Khyber and Bolan passes create links between Russia with the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East with the orient.[9] Soviet aircraft based in Afghanistan could reach the Strait of Hormuz (through which 40% of western oil imports pass) and the Persian Gulf, capable of remaining on station for 3 minutes.[10] More importantly the paranoia of the Politburo convinced them that the United States was trying to force the Soviet withdrawal so they could fill the resulting power vacuum. The Soviet leadership believed the

United States, since being forced out of Iran, was attempting to establish listening posts and Pershing II launch points in northern Afghanistan. This would pose a significant threat to sensitive Soviet military sites in the south. Islamic fundamentalism also worried the Soviets because Afghanistan could be a stepping stone into Soviet Central Asia for them. An Islamic victory in Afghanistan would be an implicit acknowledgment that Islam and Marxism were incompatible, reinforcing the lessons of Iran. This would create a belt of Islamic states around the southern side of Soviet Union which in turn could stir up religious zeal in Central Asian republics. "The Kremlin could not afford to underestimate the strength of the Islamic threat."[11]

SOVIET RISK

The Soviets faced internal and international risks associated with the decision to invade and occupy Afghanistan. Surrendering or leaving Afghanistan alone would have a detrimental effect on the Soviet Bloc. This dangerous precedent would undermine the Soviet credibility with Eastern European countries that had similar treaties. A decision to invade and occupy risked the possibility of becoming involved in a guerilla war that would cost a lot of money and lives. An unprovoked invasion would turn international opinion against the Soviets. There was no hope that China would ally with the Soviet Union, regardless, China and the Western Europeans were expected to do nothing of consequence in response to an invasion. Indira Gandhi was pro Soviet and leading in the Indian election polls, so there was no threat of Indian opposition. The United States was already delaying approval of the SALT II agreement and, assuming it would not be approved, there was nothing to lose by invading.[12] The Soviets assumed that Islamic organizations would be preoccupied with Anti American sentiment resulting from the Camp David Accords, and any protest they voiced could be mitigated by creating a hybrid Islamic-Socialist government in Afghanistan.[13] The prevailing thought was that the negative

international opinion of the invasion was mitigated enough, and the short term adverse impact was acceptable when compared to the long term security benefits that would result.

THE AFGHANISTAN COMMISSION

After the quashing of the riot in the city of Heart, the Soviet Politburo established *The Afghanistan Commission* to formulate proposals and coordinate actions concerning Afghanistan.[14] The members of the Afghanistan Commission were the head of the KGB, Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko, Minister of Defense of the Soviet Union, Dmitriy Fyodorovich Ustinov, and the Head of Central Committee's International Department, Boris Ponomarev. They were responsible for the information gathering, intelligence assessment and the primary role in policy making on Afghanistan for the nine months leading up to the invasion. The Commission supported military action and provided questionable intelligence, fearing that guerillas and disaffected military units might overthrow the Amin government and Afghanistan would then be lost.[15] While the Politburo contemplated the necessity of military action, the Afghanistan Commission began to develop the war plan, in order to be prepared when the authorization was given. They had commandeered the operational planning from the Army General Staff and initiated plan preparation without authorization from the Politburo. The planning was centralized at their level and the participants were limited to those who were integral to the plan, and whom the members knew they could trust completely.

THE PLAN

The operational objectives of the invasion were regime replacement and occupation of key facilities within the major urban areas. They determined that the proper course of action was a *coup de main* to quickly remove the government and hand the nation over to a regime of their

choosing. The Soviet Union had twice executed a coup de main and applied lessons learned to plan this operation. The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia applied important lessons from the disastrous 1956 operation against Hungary with great success and they hoped to improve on the 1968 success in Afghanistan. The tenets of the Soviet model coup de main were:[16]

1. Place advisers and forces on the ground well beforehand.
2. Identify key points and personnel that must be quickly taken or neutralized.
3. Conduct extensive General Staff reconnaissance.
4. Use a cover or deception operation to divert attention away from the main operation.
5. Neutralize air defense and communications.
6. Have combat air patrol coverage on call.
7. Use Spetsnaz, advisers, and paratroopers to seize key points.
8. Centralize planning and decentralize simultaneous execution.
9. Follow up occupation with ground forces.
10. Install a new government.

The first two tenets had already been achieved through the many years of aid that the Soviets had been providing to Afghanistan. The recent decisions and measures that the Afghanistan Commission had taken initiated the reconnaissance. The initial tactical objectives to support the coup were being refined, but they knew that the invasion forces needed to seize and occupy the eastern and western corridors along the main supply route (MSR) while airborne elements assisted the Spetsnaz, already in Afghanistan, take the main airfields (Map 4).[17] These were critical lines of communication and necessary for the force introduction and follow on support necessary to garrison the urban areas. Soviet forces and advisors already in Kabul would then conduct attacks to assassinate President Amin and seize key facilities within Kabul in order to isolate the capital, sever the command and control (C2) and control the infrastructure. The real challenge to the entire opening campaign is that all the tactical objectives must be secured intact, without significantly attriting the DRA Army, because the new regime needed the

infrastructure to govern and the Army still had a civil war to fight once they joined forces with the Soviet Army.

THE INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

According to the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-2, *Campaigning*, "a campaign is a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space."[18] The operational objective of the information campaign is to achieve the fourth tenet of the coup de main listed above, use a cover or deception operation to divert attention away from the main operation. In order to best understand the ends, ways and means of the information campaign designed by the Afghanistan Commission, one must analyze it as a supporting arm, the same as is done with artillery and other fire support assets. First we identify the targets, then the desired effects and finally the best method to "attack" those targets, essentially, an analysis of the who, what and how of the information campaign.

TARGETS

The information campaign targeted essentially four segments, or groups, to support the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. The first target that needed to be addressed was the Politburo itself. As stated earlier, Premier Brezhnev, the majority of the Politburo and the General Staff of the Army were all opposed to military intervention. The invasion would never happen if the Commission could not change these opinions, in particular that of Premier Brezhnev.

The second target was the Soviet domestic opinions about military intervention in Afghanistan. To this point the Soviet Union had been primarily using economic and diplomatic power to support the PDPA. Only within the year prior to the invasion had the military actively

become a part of the process, beyond just and advisory role. The people of the Soviet Union were not witnessing any appreciable return on the significant investment they had made in that country. Afghanistan was the first non-communist country to receive economic aid from the Soviet Union and by 1979 it was receiving the most aid of any non-communist nation. According to a 1979 Soviet account, "over the years the USSR has helped Afghanistan in some 120 industrial, agricultural and other projects of which about 70 have already been completed....The USSR has aided Afghanistan in building about 70 percent of its hard-surface roads...and three of its four international airports."[19] Popular opinion of Afghanistan was not favorable because all the money and effort that they had received had not made a change. Since the Soviet Union had not benefitted from the relationship so far, the Afghanistan Commission anticipated that the citizens would not support putting their military in danger to increase the investment and alliance with this backward nation. Even the government of the Soviet Union needs to maintain popular support to avoid their own revolution, so the Afghanistan needed to generate popular support for the invasion.

International opinion was the next target needing to be addressed in the campaign. The Afghanistan Commission still believed that international opinion was mitigated, it was important to try and maintain the appearance of détente that had been developing. "Conventional wisdom in Washington held that Moscow had a strong interest in SALT II, and interpreted Soviet behavior in this context.... It was presumed that Moscow would refrain from a major military intervention because it would almost certainly squelch the treaty."[20] The Soviet Union was experiencing positive momentum and increasing their influence internationally. Additionally, they were preparing to host the Olympic Games and it was a matter of international prestige that the games are not affected so they could benefit from the public opinion windfall. They knew

that the staunch anti-Communist nations would seize on the opportunity to embarrass the Soviets, so the Afghanistan Commission sought to influence the opinions of the nations who were neutral observers of the Cold War.

The final target was the bureaucratic and military leadership of the DRA. This is the one target that had observable measures of effectiveness, which if not achieved, would be devastating to the successful completion of the invasion. The Afghanistan Commission understood that in order to succeed they needed to ensure operational and tactical surprise in order to sever the command and control and secure the infrastructure and army necessary for the new regime, before a defense can be mounted. Failure to accomplish this task would have an adverse affect on the success of the operational and information campaigns.

METHOD

> *"Though fraud [deception] in other activities be detestable, in the management of war it is laudable and glorious, and he who overcomes an enemy by fraud is as much to be praised as he who does so by force."*
>
> **Niccolo Machiavelli**
> ***Discourses*, 1517**

Information operations focus on core capabilities as the means to achieve the desired effects. The Soviet planners relied on military deception to attack the vulnerabilities of the identified targets. Propaganda was the primary method they would use to achieve the deception and support the themes of defense, legitimatization and engagement. The themes were used across the entire spectrum and developed so they could work against multiple targets simultaneously.

Defense

The people and leaders of the Soviet Union suffered from perpetual paranoia that the imperialist forces around the world were determined to destroy their nation and their way of life. This was the critical vulnerability that the information campaign targeted to gain support for the

invasion of Afghanistan. The Politburo's greatest fear was the introduction of imperialist forces along the southern border with Afghanistan. As the situation worsened and it appeared that the government was incapable of prevailing, the Afghanistan Commission reported that the fall of the Amin government was imminent. The threat of Pershing missiles stationed within range of critical sites inside of the Soviet Union became more real and it was just a matter of time until the Politburo approved the military intervention that the Afghanistan Commission wanted.

This same argument also worked to garner support from the Soviet citizenry as well. They were not as concerned about the ideology of Afghanistan as much as they feared enemies on the border. The propaganda was amplified for the people because they were already tired of the relationship that the government had with Afghanistan. In order for the people to support putting Soviet soldiers in harm's way outside the Soviet Bloc, a real threat needed to exist. The Afghanistan Commission used the media to support their propaganda. The people truly believed that, "In Afghanistan a revolution took place which was supported by the majority of the population but which also set in motion a counter-revolution by the toppled former leaders accompanied by large scale foreign interference-the counter revolutionaries are trained by the Chinese and the Americans with financial help from Saudi Arabia and the support of Egypt and Pakistan."[21]

Legitimization

The groundwork had already been laid for the Soviets to legitimize their intervention in Afghanistan. Premier Brezhnev had already pronounced "The Brezhnev Doctrine" to legitimize the collective defense of communism against imperialism. In addition to that, The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborliness of 1978 provided for the legitimate introduction of forces to defend the partner nation against invasion by foreign forces. The

Afghanistan Commission the relied on the same propaganda that was being used against the domestic opinion to support this course of action. But they had an additional requirement that needed to be satisfied to successfully employ this; they needed to have a request from the Afghani government to come to its defense and introduce forces. They planned for the regime that they empowered through the coup to make a public request for their assistance after assuming power. The difficult part of the plan was that it would need to be made before there was any evidence of the Soviet involvement in the coup. "The outside world would readily believe that in Afghanistan, where two presidents had been killed in twenty months in what were generally seen as internal conflicts (and the four preceding kings murdered or overthrown), a third president with Amin's bloody reputation had also fallen to domestic forces. Then the way would be clear to install a more compliant leader who would publicly invite the Soviets to save him from his own people-while saying the danger was from across the Pakistani and Iranian borders."[22] The Soviets knew that the United States and other adversaries of theirs would not believe this, but the plan was to maintain an air of legitimacy with the neutral nations in order to maintain their neutrality, and they believed this could accomplish that end.

Engagement

Engagement was used by the Soviets against international opinion and the C2 of the DRA. The Soviet Union had been providing advisers to the DRA since 1956 and by 1979 they were involved in the daily administration of the nation. It was not uncommon for the Western Intelligence agencies to observe Soviet forces moving across the border to operate within Afghanistan. As the situation deteriorated "engagement" became more involved until there were military officers actually in command of DRA Army units. The Afghanistan Commission intended to use this as a pretext to divert attention from the invasion until it was too late for

anyone to respond effectively to the situation. Then plan was to deceive the DRA and Western nations of the true purpose of the military forces that were observed entering Afghanistan.

The United States was aware of what was happening, they just failed to interpret it properly. On December 24th and 25th, waves of military aircraft were detected flying into Afghanistan,...Initial intelligence reporting still described these forces as intended to provide security for the Soviet personnel in Afghanistan, and said that if they were used in combat operations, it would be on a small scale to assist the ailing Afghan regime."[23] This failure was planned for in order to give the Soviets time to complete the coup de main, replace the regime, and then receive the appropriate request for assistance to diminish international opposition.

The Soviets relied on the engagement and the deeply embedded Soviets to create manipulate information, as well as commit acts of sabotage, in order to support the invasion. The plan was to infiltrate key positions with the advisers, and with forces flying in ahead of the invasion so they could be in position to execute the coup without drawing any attention. The main invasion force, the 40th Army, would occupy key nodes and fortifications under the pretext of a combined training exercise. Amin would be informed that they were coming to assist him in fighting the mujahideen, under the cover story of it being a training exercise. Then at the designated time, the coup would be initiated in Kabul. Before the governmental and military leadership was aware and able to react to the action, the communication links would be severed and access blocked by Soviet forces. By the time the Afghani leadership was aware of what was happening the Soviets would have accomplished coup de main tenets four through seven and prepared to continue. If successful, the plan would conclude with the Soviet forces in control of all the key infrastructure within the capital city as well as the airfields and major fortifications along the MSR. There would have been minimal combat between the DRA and Soviet forces, so

casualties would be negligible and infrastructure damage practically imperceptible. This was going to be a key measure of effectiveness and critical for the overall success of the operation. First, the invasion must be accomplished with very little loss of lives because the Politburo and Soviet citizenry would not accept high costs in order to control Afghanistan. Secondly, multiple engagements, infrastructure damage and high casualties would not support the claims of legitimacy that were planned to defuse international opposition. Lastly, if they failed to deceive the DRA and gain operational and tactical surprise, then they would end up needing to defeat the DRA Army in combat, making them ineffective for the following phases of the occupation. The Soviet plan for the DRA Army to take the fight to the rebels would never materialize and the Soviets would then be at another decision point to increase troop involvement or surrender control of Afghanistan.

The plan was now in place and the Afghanistan Commission begun generating the force and getting the pieces in place. The phases of the information campaign were planned to first address the opinions in the Politburo and domestically, through fear and paranoia. Then use the information from that phase to begin the accusations of foreign interference to legitimize the intervention, and continue to build on the fear generated in the first phase. Finally, with little forewarning, they would transition into the final phase with the infiltration and insertion of Soviet forces under the cover of a training exercise and security forces, prepared to initiate the invasion against an unsuspecting and neutered defense. The centralized planning and intense operational and informational security ensured that the plan was coordinated, synchronized and unknown to anyone outside of the inner circle.

PREPARATION

Acting on their own initiative, the Afghanistan Commission began the reconnaissance well before the plan had been presented to the Premier and Politburo. A paratroop battalion dressed in Afghan uniforms and a signal center, transferred to Bagram air base in March 1979, conducted the initial reconnaissance. General of the Army Aleksiy A. Yepishev, head of the Main Political Directorate, led a delegation in April 1979 to assess the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, in the same way as he had done prior to the 1968 Czechoslovakia invasion. General of the Army Ivan G. Pavlovski, Commander in Chief (CINC) of the Soviet Ground Forces and commander of the Czechoslovakian invasion force, led another reconnaissance party in August 1979 which lasted for weeks. The plan identified thirteen key objectives (Map 5) necessary to achieve the desired endstate. Two thirty-man Spetsnaz groups, code-named "Grom" (Thunder) and "Zenit" (Zenith) deployed to conduct area and point reconnaissance of these objectives.[24]

President Amin's requests for Soviet forces, having been previously denied, were getting approved at this time so the Soviets could increase their in-country strength for the impending coup de main. In November 1979, a Spetsnaz "Muslim" battalion, dressed in Afghani uniforms from Central Asia to Afghanistan, assisted with airfield security and later was incorporated into the presidential security forces. Minister Ustinov issued verbal orders activating reserve soldiers and assigning them to the 40th Army. The reconstituted 40th Army, out of Turkmenistan, consisted of the 5th and 108th Motorized Rifle Divisions (MRD), the 103d Airborne Division, the 860th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiment (MRR), the 56th Separate Air Assault Brigade, the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment, the 2d Air Defense Brigade, and the 34th Composite Aviation Corps.

The Afghanistan Commission had all the information and intelligence to support the detailed planning. According to intelligence reports, President Amin had reportedly met with both fundamental Islamists and western countries to request assistance and support for the removal of Soviet influence from Afghanistan. This information necessitated a final decision on military intervention. On December 12th 1979 Premier Brezhnev signed an order authorizing the invasion of Afghanistan and replacement the Amin regime. The first phase of the information campaign was complete and succeeded in gaining the domestic and political support necessary to initiate the ground operations. The plan was disseminated, but in order to maintain secrecy, leaders only received the portion of the order that pertained specifically to their mission.

EXECUTING THE PLAN

"On 22 and 23 December Ambassador Tabeyev informed Amin that his request for Soviet troops to be sent to Afghanistan had been granted in full from Moscow. They were ready to begin deployment on 25 December. Amin expressed gratitude to the Soviet leadership and gave instructions to the DRA Armed Forces General Staff to give assistance to the deploying troops."[25] The stage was set for the invasion to commence under the guise of a cooperative military exercise between the two nations. The fate of Afghanistan and President Amin had been sealed.

On 24 December 1979 the execution order was signed by Minister Ustinov and declared that:

> The latest appeal of the government of Afghanistan has been favorably considered considering the military-political situation in the Middle East. The decision has been made to deploy several contingents of Soviet troops stationed in the southern regions of the country to the territory of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in order to give international aid to the friendly Afghan people and also to create favorable conditions to interdict possible anti-Afghan actions from neighboring countries...[26]

The Red Army believed they were aiding an ally against the incursions of anti-communist and imperial governments, seeking the ultimate destruction of the Soviet Union. It was not until December 27th that units were authorized to engage resistance units while executing their missions.

On December 25th Defense Minister Ustinov issued the order to cross the line of departure at 1500 (Moscow time) that same day. At 1500 the 108th MRD crossed the floating bridge from Termez to seize the critical Salang Pass, the 357th and 66th MRDs crossed the border from Kushka and the 103d Airborne Division and the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment began their flights bound for the airfields in Kabul and nearby Bagram. On that same day Soviet advisers initiated actions to prevent Afghan units from approaching Kabul or interfering with the invasion. Vehicles were drained of fuel, batteries were removed, and ammunition was offloaded from tanks. Air defense systems were temporarily disabled by removing the sights or by physically locking them. Consequently, the Soviet ground forces and air armada moved through Afghanistan unopposed.[27] By December 27th there were 50,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan with 5,000 in and around Kabul staged to execute the main thrust of the coup de main.

The coup de main was set to begin at 1930 on December 27th. The plan to seize Kabul identified thirteen objectives that were to be seized by the forces that were already in Kabul. (Map 4) The signal was going to be an explosion that destroyed the main communications conduit which connected the country's military units. Despite centralized planning, the execution was extremely decentralized; units were informed of only their own mission and unaware of other units operating within the city. At 1930 the explosion rocked the city and in relatively short time the majority of the objectives were secured. After an attempted poisoning failed[28] the "muslim" battalion, airborne troops and Spetsnaz forces assaulted the Taj-Bek

Palace. The security force resisted the attack and both sides took casualties. According to one account, the Afghan troops eventually broke when they were "overcome by the use of 'napalm bombs and incendiary bombs.'"[29] Just prior to 2000 the palace was secured and President Amin was assassinated and the Muslim battalion prepared for a counter attack that never materialized..

Shortly after that the newly emplaced leader of Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal addressed the nation on the radio and declared that "...the torture machine of Amin...has been broken...." and he was assuming the presidency.[30] The next day he again addressed the nation and publicly announced that the Soviet Union had answered the request of the Afghani government for support in accordance with the Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighborliness that was signed in 1978.

CONCLUSION

> "It is easy to dismiss the Soviet failure in Afghanistan, but it is not wise. Armies seldom get to choose the wars in which they fight and this type of difficult war is as likely a future conflict as a war involving high technology systems in which the sides seldom get close enough to see each other. Russia continues to fight guerilla wars. Other nations may also have to."
>
> -Lester Grau, 2002.

The Soviet Union suffered an enormous strategic failure when they were not able to defeat the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. In spite of that fact, some significant operational successes are notable and worthy of understanding by military professionals. Within two days the Soviet Union had successfully overwhelmed the DRA Army, overthrown the government, assassinated the President, seized the capital and occupied major cities and airfields along the main highway in Afghanistan. In the process the Red Army had sustained only 24 KIA, 44 accidental deaths and 74 WIA during the invasion. This was the single high point of the Soviet Afghan War for the Red Army.

Since 1919 the Soviet Union had used all the elements of national power to support Afghanistan and maintain it within their sphere of influence. Afghanistan was geopolitically important and critical to the Soviet Cold War strategy and national defense. As instability and rebellion was consuming the nation, the Soviets realized they were approaching an important decision point. They needed to either politically and economically prop up a failing regime or militarily intervene in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.

The Soviets had refined the tactics for a coup de main against Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and masterfully executed them in their opening campaign. Because the information campaign plan had been focused, coordinated and comprehensive, the operational objectives of the invasion had been achieved, casualties were minimal and the mission was complete before the international community was fully aware of what was happening.

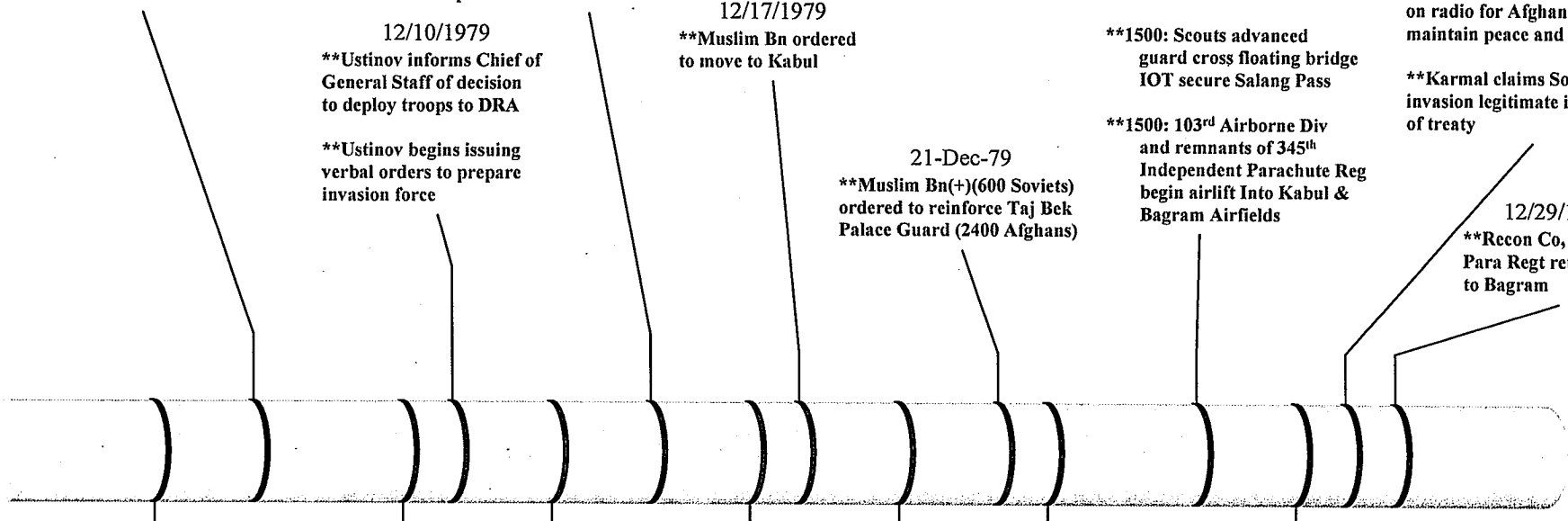
Deception at the tactical and operational level ensured the 40th Army maintained the element of surprise through the invasion and coup de main. Centralized planning ensured that the complex plan was properly phased and coordinated; creating tempo that confused and disoriented the Afghan. Although the operational tenets of the Soviet model would be difficult to replicate today, the underlying tasks of the coup de main and the information operations supporting it remain relevant and plausible. The success of the invasion was short lived however because of the short sightedness of the planning. The planners did not take the time to develop the sequel to this campaign, and did not even consider any branch in case their assumptions proved to be incorrect. Unfortunately for them, their assumptions about the effectiveness of the information operation to sustain the fabricated propaganda and the ability of the DRA Army to take the fight to the rebels both proved to be incorrect and the Soviet forfeited any momentum they had gained from the surprise opening gambit.

The lesson at the operational to strategic level comes to the forefront after considering the counter insurgency that followed the invasion. The Soviets learned that an IO plan that is based on the manipulation and fabrication of information works very well for the short term, but is unsustainable for the long term. Domestic support turned against them as the Soviet people learned that the propaganda they accepted was all a lie. International opposition developed into material and economic support to the mujahideen as their true intentions became more evident.

They also learned that planners cannot simply assume away the source of power once they identify it; actions must be taken to address that center of gravity. The Soviet failure to recognize and address the tribal influence entangled them in a decade long counter insurgency that cost them incredible human and financial capital. Shortly thereafter the Soviet Union crumbled and the Cold War came to an end.

The United States' operations in Afghanistan and Iraq generally resemble the Soviet situation; early success against a centralized government leading to decentralized irregular war. As counter insurgency becomes more the rule than the exception and power bases in international hot spots are factionalized and decentralized, the lessons of the Soviet-Afghan war are more prescient than ever before. Tactical and operational leaders must understand this so they can plan and prepare to succeed on the battlefields of the future.

Appendix A
Soviet Invasion Timeline



1 December 1979

12/4/1979
**LtGen Vadim Kirpichenko sent to Kabul to prep for Amin's removal from power

12/6/1979
**Decision to send 500 men from General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate: "Muslim" Bn

12/9/1979
**"Muslim Bn (520 men) begin landing at Bagram

12/10/1979
**Ustinov informs Chief of General Staff of decision to deploy troops to DRA

**Ustinov begins issuing verbal orders to prepare invasion force

12/12/1979
**Premier Brezhnev signs orders to remove Amin

**108th MRD placed on alert 180th MRR moved to border

12/14/1979
**Ministry of Defense Operations Group (OG MO) establishes HQ in Termez to coordinate operations

12/16/1979
**Attempted poisoning of Amin fails

**40th Army Field HQ Ordered to mobilize

12/17/1979
**Muslim Bn ordered to move to Kabul

12/19/1979
**MajGen Yuriy Drozdev, Chief of KGB Directorate of Illegal Intelligence, joins Muslim Bn

21-Dec-79
**Muslim Bn(+)(600 Soviets) ordered to reinforce Taj Bek Palace Guard (2400 Afghans)

22-Dec-79
**Ambassador Tabeyev tells President Amin Soviets are filling his request for troops in full

12/25/1979
**0700: 2 Pontoon Bridge Regiments begin laying floating bridges IVO Termez

**1200: Ustinov orders 40th Army LD @ 1500 (Moscow Time)

**1500: Scouts advanced guard cross floating bridge IOT secure Salang Pass

**1500: 103rd Airborne Div and remnants of 345th Independent Parachute Reg begin airlift Into Kabul & Bagram Airfields

12/27/1979
**1830: 2 paratrooper Plts(+) assault Afghan Military Counter Intel building

**1900: Special Forces infiltrate DRA General Staff Bldg

**1915: Assault on Taj Bek Palace "Storm-333" begins

**1930: Communications conduit destroyed isolating Kabul

**1930: Recon Co. 345th Independent Para Regt assaults radio television center; mission complete 2010

**1930: 2 Paratrooper Plts(+) assault compound with Ministry of Foreign Affairs building and National Armed Police building; surrendered 1945

**1930 Paratrooper Co (+) assaults HQ DRA Central Army Corps; surrendered 2015

**1958: Taj Bek Palace seized, Pres. Amin assassinated

**2100: Paratrooper platoon assaults telegraph office; surrendered 2120

**Babrak Karmal radio address declaring his presidency

12/28/1979
**AM: Central Army Corps commander orders corps units to cease resistance and recognize new govt.

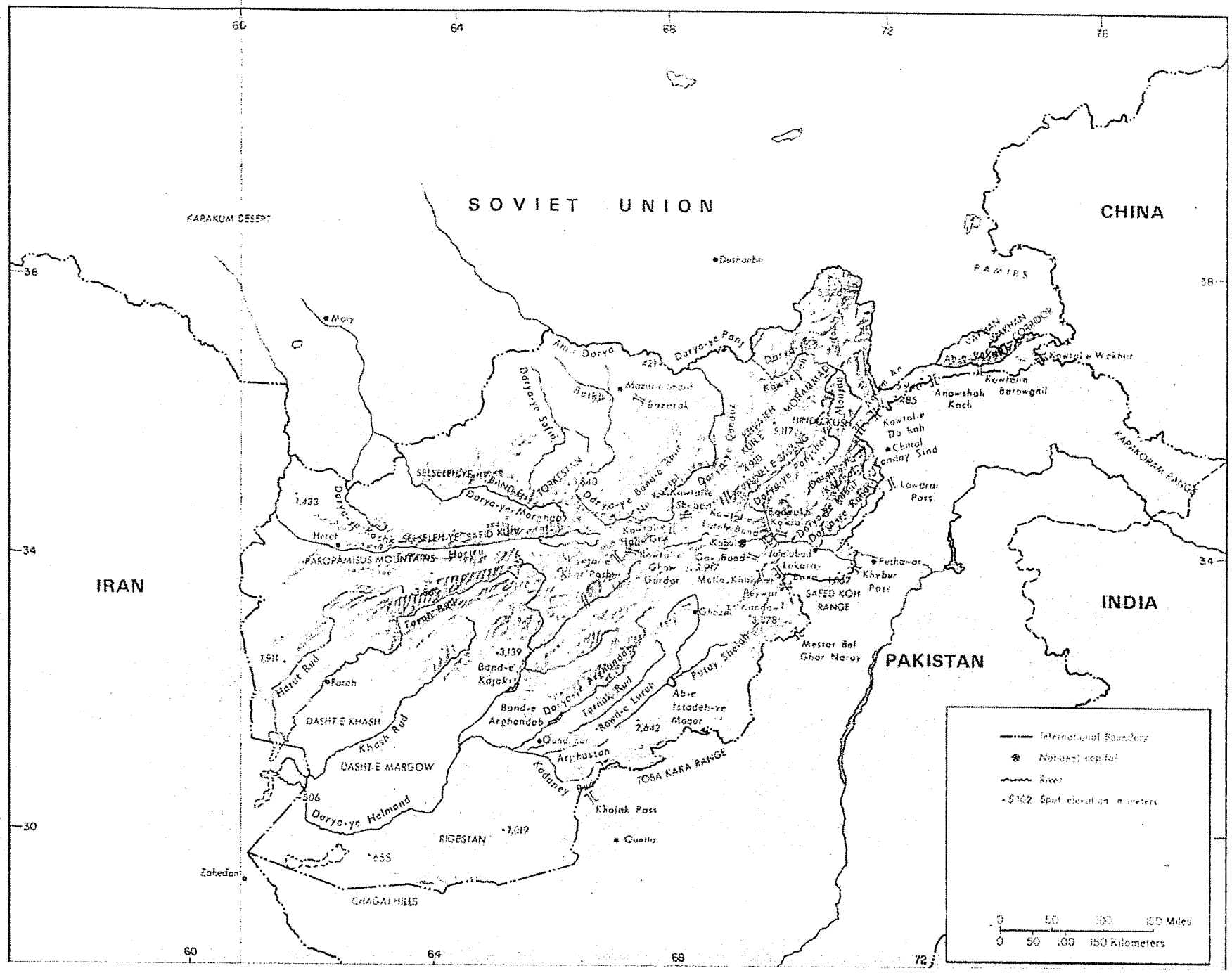
** Karmal broadcast appeal on radio for Afghanis to maintain peace and order

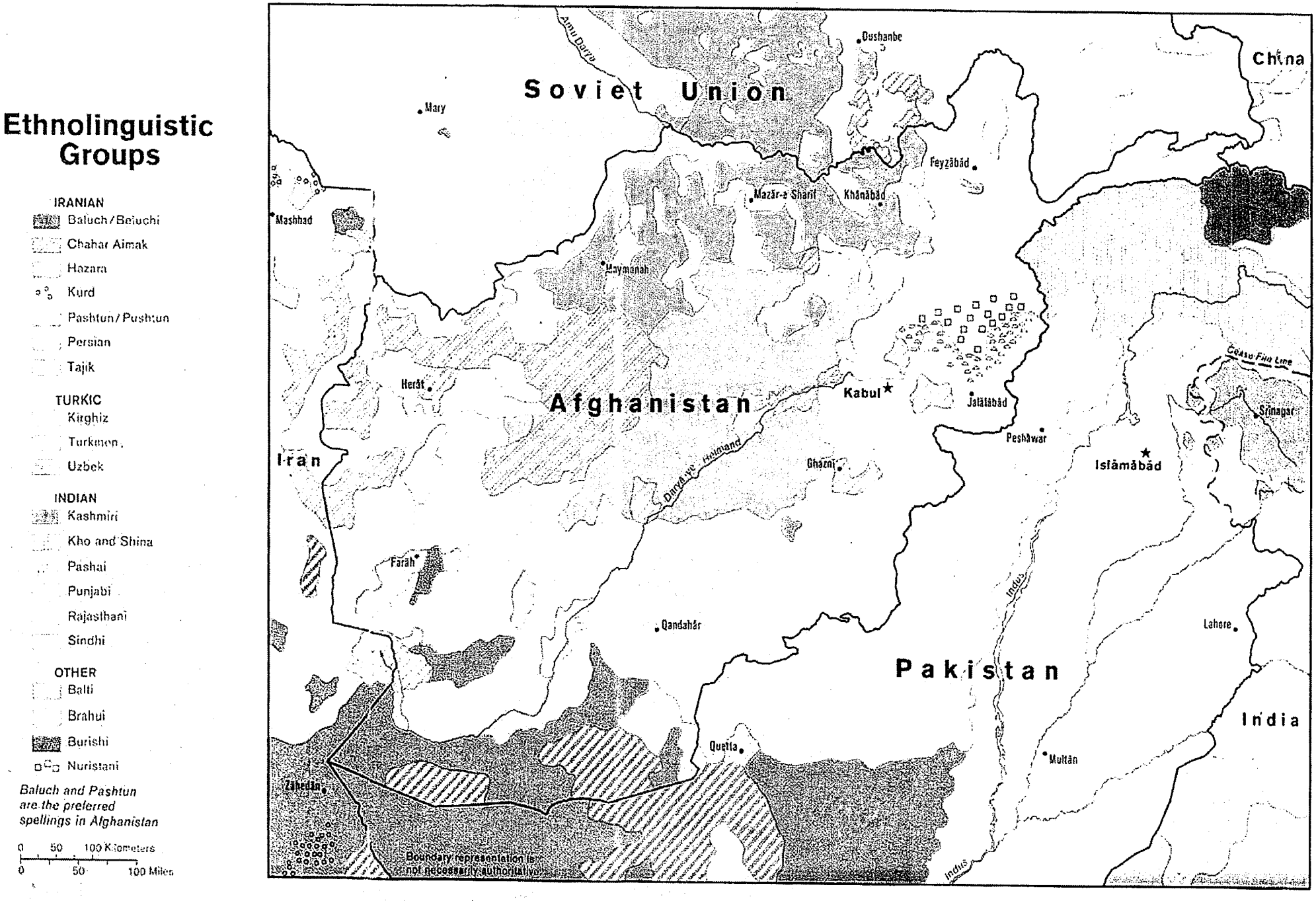
**Karmal claims Soviet invasion legitimate in support of treaty

12/29/1979
**Recon Co, 345th Ind Para Regt returns to Bagram

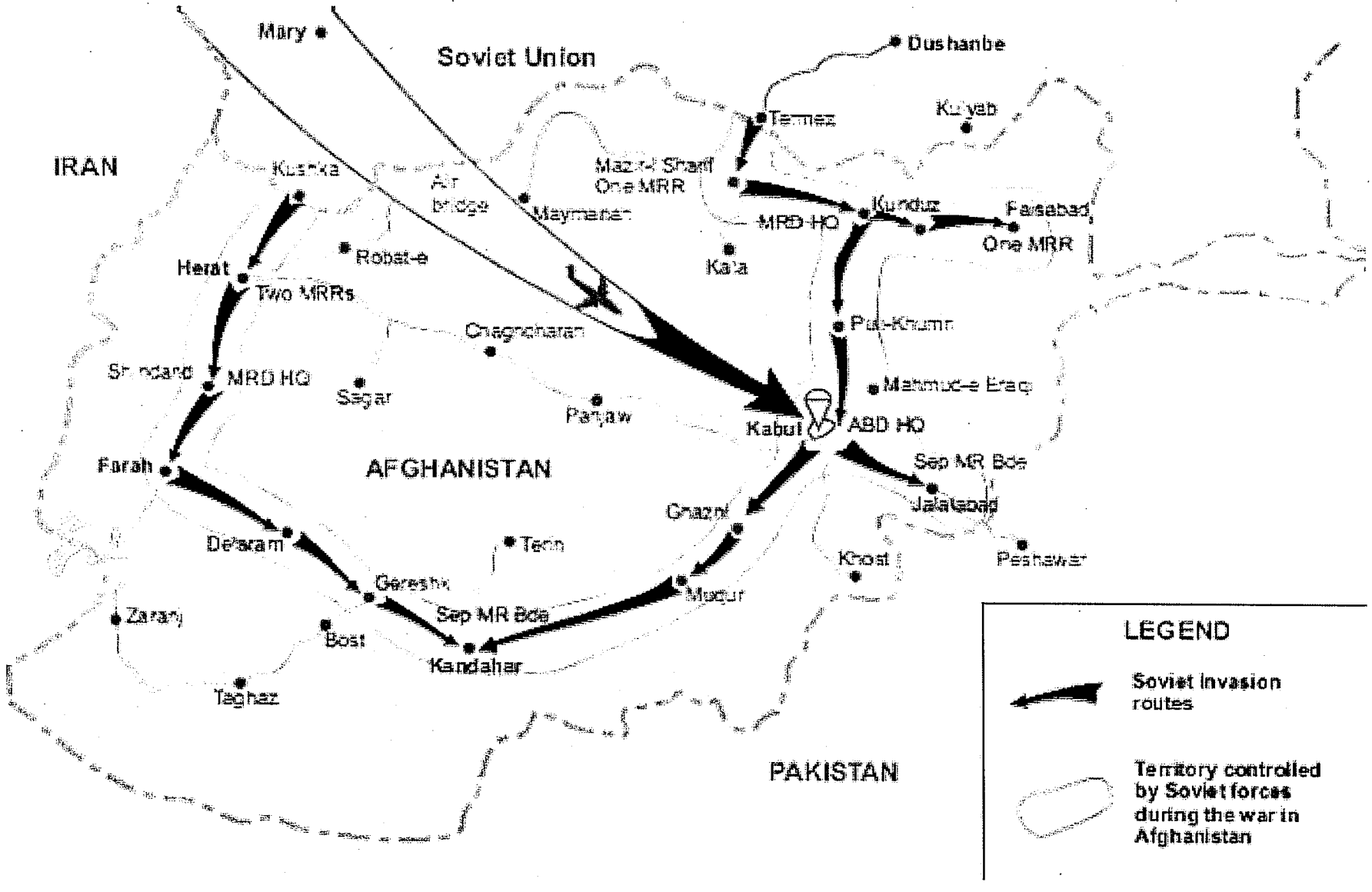
1 January 1980

Compiled From Grau, "The Take Down of Kabul: An Effective Coup de Main," and Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy, *Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1978*

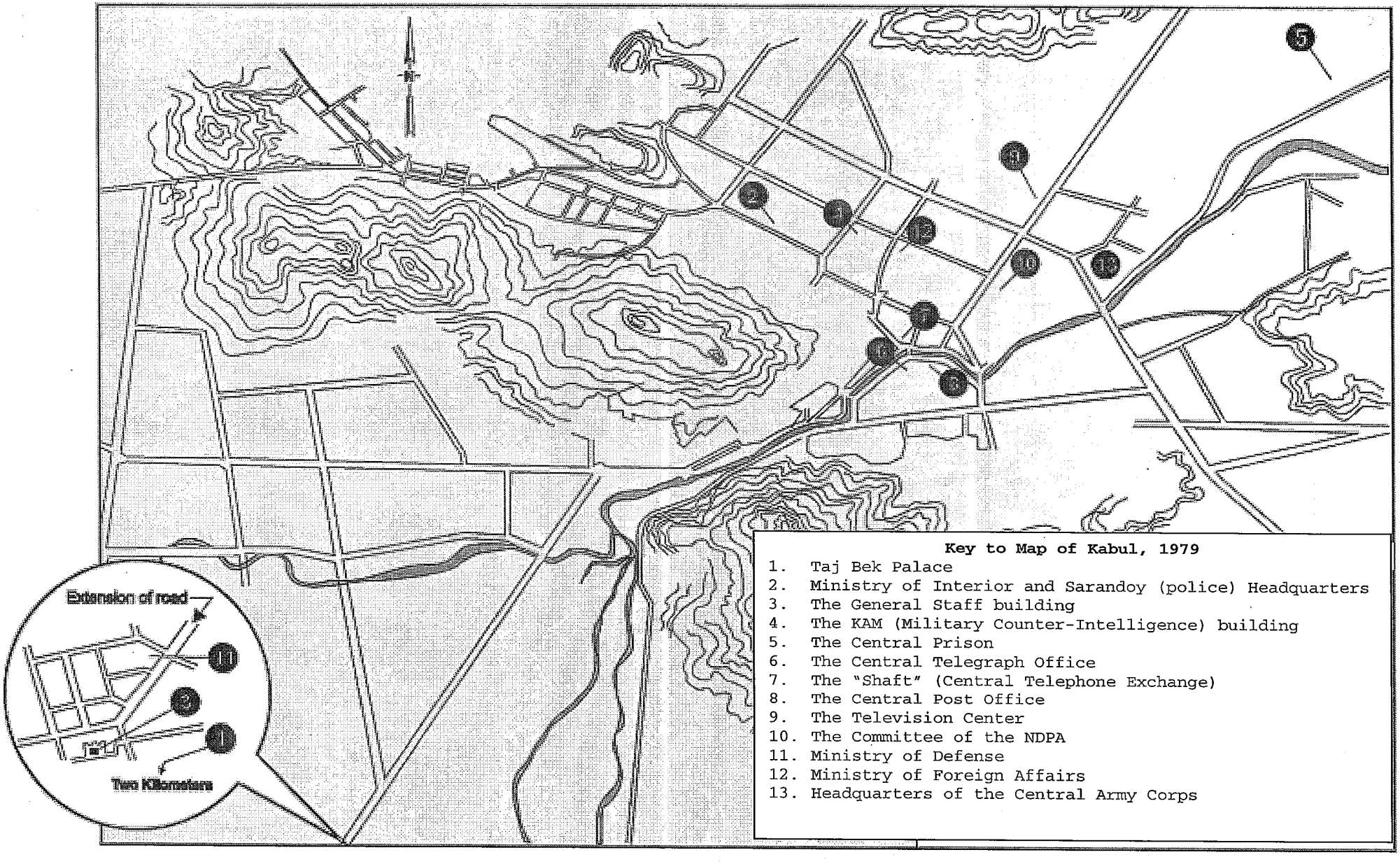

SOVIET UNION
CHINA
IRAN
PAKISTAN
INDIA
KARAKUM DESERT
PAMIRS
HINDU KUSH
PAROPAMISUS MOUNTAINS
SAFED KOH RANGE
TOBA KAKA RANGE
DASHT E KHASH
DASHT-E MARGOW
REGESTAN
CHAGAI HILLS
SELSELEH-YE BAND-E BAYAN
SELSELEH-YE SAFID KUH
KOHE BABA
KOHE SAFID
Dasht-e Qipchaq
Mary
Herat
Farah
Ghazni
Gardez
Jalalabad
Peshawar
Khyber Pass
Kandahar
Quetta
Khojak Pass
Zahedan
Mestar Bel
Ghar Narai
Darya-ye Helmand
Harirud
Farah Rud
Khash Rud
Tarnak Rud
Kabul
Kowtal-e Khyber
Kowtal-e Lowgar
Kowtal-e Da Rah
Kowtal-e Sheberghan
Kowtal-e Salang
Kowtal-e Shibar
Kowtal-e Gulbahar
Kowtal-e Ghorband
Kowtal-e Hajigak
Kowtal-e Ghar
Kowtal-e Gar Band
Kowtal-e Kajaki
Kowtal-e Arghandab
Kowtal-e Lora
Kowtal-e Abrisatadeh-ye Maqor
Kowtal-e Anawshak Kach
Kowtal-e Barowghil
Kowtal-e Wakhir
Lowgar Pass
Sanday Sind
Chitral
Dushanbe
Band-e Kajaki
Band-e Arghandab
Band-e Bayan
Band-e Amir
Darya-ye Panj
Darya-ye Kokcha
Darya-ye Kunduz
Darya-ye Surkhab
Darya-ye Salang
Darya-ye Morghab
Darya-ye Amu
Darya-ye Kabul
Darya-ye Panjshir
Darya-ye Logar
Darya-ye Ghorband
Darya-ye Kunar
Darya-ye Konar
Darya-ye Arghandab
Darya-ye Tarnak
Darya-ye Lora
Darya-ye Arghastan
Darya-ye Khash
Darya-ye Harirud
Darya-ye Farah Rud
Darya-ye Helmand
Darya-ye Qaisar
Darya-ye Qaisar
Darya-ye Qaisar



Map 2
Afghan Ethno linguistic Groups 1982
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethno_1982.jpg



Map 3
Soviet Invasion Plan
The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War:How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, 2001, 16.



Key to Map of Kabul, 1979

1. Taj Bek Palace
2. Ministry of Interior and Sarandoy (police) Headquarters
3. The General Staff building
4. The KAM (Military Counter-Intelligence) building
5. The Central Prison
6. The Central Telegraph Office
7. The "Shaft" (Central Telephone Exchange)
8. The Central Post Office
9. The Television Center
10. The Committee of the NDPA
11. Ministry of Defense
12. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
13. Headquarters of the Central Army Corps

Map 4
Coup de Main Kabul Objectives
Block by Block:The Challenges of Urban Operations 2002, 297

Notes

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[6] The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost,* eds. and trans. Michael Gress and Lester W. Grau (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2001), 9-10.

[7] Ibid., 10.

[8] Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union,* rev. ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 123.

[9] James Phillips, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan." 9 January 1980, *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1980), 6 from URL: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/upload/86944_1.pdf>. Accessed December 13, 2008.

[10] Ibid.,7.

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Ibid., 15.

[13] Ibid.,16.

[14] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2005), 392.

[15] Bradsher, 124.

[16] Lester W. Grau, "The Take Down of Kabul: An Effective Coup de Main," *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations,* eds. William G. Robertson and Lawrence A. Yates, online edition, (Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2003). URL: <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/carl/download/csipubs/Block/chp9_Block%20by%20Block.pdf>. Accessed December 13, 2008. Cited hereafter as Grau, "The Take Down of Kabul," 2003.

[17]Ibid., 292-293.

[18] U.S. Marine Corps. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-2. *Campaigning.* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, August 1997), 3.

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[20] Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979: Failure of Intelligence or of the Policy Process?* Working Group Report No. 111 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, September 25, 2005), URL: <http://isd.georgetown.edu/Afghan_1_WR_group.pdf>. Accessed September 13, 2008, 10. Cited hereafter as Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Working Group Report No. 111.

[21] Oudenaren, 23.

[22] Bradsher, 175-176.

[23] Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Working Group Report No. 111, 6.

[24] Grau, "The Take Down of Kabul," 2003, 292.

[25] Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy, *Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1978* (Washington D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 2007), 37 from URL: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/WP51_Web_Final.pdf >. Accessed September 13, 2008.

[26] Ibid., 40.

[27] Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History From Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002), 235.

[28] President Amin was resuscitated and saved by Soviet doctors who were unaware of the invasion plan. One was killed and one wounded during the assault.

[29] M. Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). URL: <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft7b69p12h/>

[30] Tanner, 237.

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